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EACC Assembly Set for 1959 in Malaya

(Singapore) - The constituting assembly of the East Asia Christian Conference was set for May 14-26, 1959, in Malaya, by the conference's interim committee, at a meeting early this month in Singapore.

The 19-member committee heard reports of "a widespread desire" of inter-church and cooperative groups in Asia to be related to the EACC, but made no decision about the structure of the future organisation. Instead, it asked committees dealing with family life, industrial evangelism, Christian medical work, literature, visual aids and other work to wait for a decision by the constituting assembly.

The committee said it was "encouraged" to hear of the participation of Asian countries in the recent appeal for Indonesia, issued by the Division of Inter-Church Aid and Service to Refugees of the World Council of Churches. Contributions for the appeal have come from churches in Burma, Vietnam, India, Pakistan, Korea, Japan, Hong Kong and New Zealand.

In other action, the committee made plans for studies in Asia of rapid social change, mission-church relations and religious liberty; planned to assist in the exchange of fraternal workers in Asia; approved the organising, in Burma, of the first Ecumenical Church Loan Fund national committee to be set up outside Europe; and heard travel reports from its three staff members, Dr. D.T. Niles, U Kyaw Than and the Rev. Alan Brash. Presiding at the session was Bishop E.C. Sobrepena of the Philippines.

E.P.S., Geneva

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Baptist Leader Reports on Conditions in Spain

(Washington, D.C.) - Persecution of evangelicals in Spain is not violent, but "subtle and persistent", according to a report made to the Baptist World Alliance headquarters in Washington by its president, Dr. Theodore F. Adams.

Dr. Adams, who has visited Baptist work in several European nations, said there were still a number of situations where Spanish authorities continue to cause difficulty but added that at the Baptist seminary in Barcelona, young people were allowed to attend the annual study week programme which was banned by police two years ago.

"The chief difficulty," the Baptist official said, "centres around the right to marry". He called the civil marriage situation "deplorable" and said it was "even worse than when I visited there in 1956". A Spanish law prohibits civil marriage except for non-Catholics. Dr. Adams reported that youths from Baptist families usually do not have trouble getting permission for a civil ceremony, but others who were baptised in the Roman Catholic church and have since "renounced their Catholic ties and become faithful Baptists" find it almost impossible to prove that they are non-Catholics.

Baptists make up about 2,600 of the estimated 20,000 evangelicals in Spain, Dr. Adams said, and have 42 churches and 33 pastors. E.P.S., Geneva

Peace Churches Ask Renunciation of A-Weapons

(Kassel) - Representatives of the historic peace churches - Mennonites, Friends and Brethren - have asked the World Council of Churches to urge "the total renunciation of all nuclear weapons". The Fellowship of Reconciliation also joined in the request, which was addressed to the WCC's Central Committee, to meet August 21-29 in Nyborg, Denmark.

The representatives of the four groups, meeting in Kassel, Germany, this month, called on the council "to speak at this time both to governments and to the people" to reaffirm the conviction that "war is contrary to the will of God and incompatible with the precepts and example of our Lord, Jesus Christ".

The statement said that "to acquiesce in the manufacture and use of nuclear weapons is, we believe, a sin against God, a sin against our fellow-man, a sin against generations yet unborn". E.P.S., Geneva

Religion, as Reported by the Soviet Press

(Moscow) - "Scientific atheistic propaganda" in Soviet Russia is described as both inadequate and unconvincing in current issues of Russian newspapers.

The July 5 issue of "Krasnaia Zvezda", the USSR Army paper, carries the complaint that "scientific atheism" is failing to spread in the army. Another complaint is that there are not enough books about atheism in army libraries, and not enough requests for the books that are there.

The same issue also reports that a member of a Komsomol (a Communist youth group), dropped a prayer book from his pocket while getting out money to pay his membership fee in the group. Why did the incident not cause alarm in the Communist youth headquarters, asks the paper. It goes on to insist that "every individual who has long been subject to the influence of pious people and church leaders should receive careful personal instruction" through atheistic propaganda.

The June 15 issue of "Molodiosch Estonoi", a youth paper published by the Communist party in Estonia, calls for an attack on Christians. "In our struggle with religion," the paper says, "we must be a hundred times as persistent as

church people. We militant atheists know that we are strong, because we are fighting for the true cause, against all religion. History will thank us for instilling our atheistic convictions into people who are still stupid enough to believe in religion, and naïve enough to hope that supernatural miracles will make up for their own inadequacy and irresponsibility. As lords of the earth and creators of history we must not betray our convictions, for our faith is faith in Communism which in its sincerity is the only true faith in the world."

The Russian Christian tradition is, however, recognised in the Soviet press. An article in the July 11 number of "Izvestia" the leading Moscow daily, describes impressions of the "venerable old Kremlin of Rostov", recently restored by the state. A correspondent writes: "From the high walls of the Kremlin I am looking down into the courtyard where a group of young people is entering the main door, among the tourists. Soviet people love and venerate the glorious monuments of the past built by their forefathers." E.P.S., Geneva

Roman Catholic Bishop Criticises Overpopulation Critics

(Buffalo, New York) - Roman Catholics will not pay attention to attempts to "frighten" humanity by emphasising the threat of overpopulation, according to Bishop Joseph A. Burke of Buffalo, speaking at the twenty-sixth annual convention of the National Catholic Conference on Family Life.

Bishop Burke said that "if overpopulation threatens us, God helping" us, we shall find a means of overcoming that challenge. If we have faith in God, He will not punish those who follow His command to be fruitful, multiply and fill the earth."

His comments follow recent widespread discussion on birth control and overpopulation in Roman Catholic circles. Criticism of the official Roman Catholic viewpoint has come from many quarters. One of the most publicised comments was a speech in April by Dr. Richard M. Fagley, executive secretary of the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs, warning that the fuse on the "population bomb" in underdeveloped areas of the world is getting short, and advocating a positive Christian approach to family planning. E.P.S., Geneva

CCIA Officers Cable Hammar-skjöld

(New York) - Acting on the urgent representations of the general secretary of the World Council of Churches, Dr. W.A. Visser 't Hooft, pressing for the furtherance of any chance of conciliation and cooperation for peace, the officers of the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs have cabled Mr. Dag Hammar-skjöld of the UN, and the governments mainly concerned, stressing the "solemn urgency that immediate and positive steps be taken to prevent a deepening of the crisis in the Middle East".

The message asked that "all channels of consultation that are open should be utilised, including the available procedures of the United Nations and a possible meeting of heads of state, within the UN framework, as well as the normal avenues of diplomacy". E.P.S., Geneva

Bishop Dibelius Defends Martin Niemöller

(Berlin) - Writing in the July 20 issue of "Die Kirche", a Sunday paper published in Berlin, Bishop Otto Dibelius has defended the outstanding role played by Pastor Martin Niemöller during the war-time struggle of the Confessing Church in Germany.

Writing in reply to an article in "Rheinische Merkur" criticising a book on the "Church Struggle", just published by Pastor Niemöller's brother, Wilhelm Niemöller, Bishop Dibelius says that the struggle of the Confessing Church was

exclusively directed towards preventing the disintegration of the church through national socialism. And in this struggle, he says, "Martin Niemöller was the 'leader'".

The "Rheinische Merkur" reviewer had said that the book misrepresented the attitude of the Confessing Church and of Pastor Niemöller during the early years of the church's struggle.

Bishop Dibelius writes that Pastor Niemöller's sermons "were filled with deep Christian conviction and it is this - and nothing else - which explains their attraction and their extraordinary influence. The congregation believed what he preached. It had full confidence that this passionate man, who was so modest in his sermons, would always be true to what he preached so openly and courageously. And they were never disappointed."

Pointing out that "Adolf Hitler had his reasons" for imprisoning Pastor Niemöller in 1938, Bishop Dibelius says it was because the German churchman "made Hitler realise that it would not be so easy to dispose of the Protestant Church as he had imagined".

Martin Niemöller's name will be remembered "long after those who struggled at his side have been forgotten", the bishop wrote. He added: "It is the name of a man who resolutely staked his whole life for the sake of his faith and for the sake of the true Church."

"We maintain that firmly - we who stood with him - although the decisions we thought it right to take concerning politics and church policy differed from his. And we hope that the conflicts of today will not obscure our perception of what was essential in the past."

E.P.S., Geneva

Lutheran/CSI Discussions Continue

(Madras) - Indian Lutherans are studying a new statement from the Church of South India on the ministry and the episcopacy, aimed at breaking a deadlock which developed in 1956.

In the current statement, the CSI theological commission says that a system of bishops is needed "as episcopacy has been accepted in the Church from early times", but added that the Church of South India "does not consider episcopal ordination essential for a valid ministry". However, the statement says that "there cannot be a universally accepted ministry which does not include the historic episcopate as one element".

From 1947, when the Church of South India was formed, until 1956, Lutheran representatives met with the CSI for theological discussions. However, since then the theological commissions of the CSI and the Federation of Evangelical Lutheran Churches in India have not held further joint sessions. The Church of South India was formed by the union of Anglican, Methodist, Presbyterian, Congregational and Reformed churches.

E.P.S., Geneva

US Needs Christian "Revolution", Presbyterian Says

(Silver Bay, New York) - Pointing out that "there never has been a more difficult age than this for the Church to carry out its mission", Dr. Charles T. Leber, of the United Presbyterian Church in the USA, has called for a "non-violent Christian revolution" to shake up the complacency of Americans with regard to race, corruption and the "worship" of material advances.

Speaking at the annual Silver Bay Conference on the Christian World Mission, sponsored by four units of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA, Dr. Leber told 530 delegates that such a revolution would not be a "revolt of violence" but "an inevitable and righteous revolution which demands that things be changed and man made free".

Dr. Leber said that "war has humiliated the Church by making it conscious of its failures. It has shocked the Church into finally seeing that there can be no prophetic preaching until the Church outlaws war and refuses to participate in it."

Dr. Leber is general secretary of his denomination's Commission on Ecumenical Mission and Relations.

E.P.S., Geneva

Chapel Opens at SAFFA Exhibition in Switzerland

(Zurich) - For the first time, a chapel has been included in an exhibition held in Switzerland. Dedicated on Sunday, July 20, the building is part of the Exhibition of the Work of Swiss Women (SAFFA), which opened last week in Zurich.

The chapel is the result of close cooperation between women's associations of the various confessions in Switzerland, and all Christian confessions are holding services in the chapel during the two-month exhibition. In addition to daily services in the Protestant, Roman Catholic and Old Catholic traditions, inter-confessional noon-day services are also held. Jewish services are scheduled during the exhibition.

Other programmes in the chapel include religious concerts, lectures, Bible study, mission reports, and an inter-confessional conference on "Women in the Church and the World".

E.P.S., Geneva

In Brief

Dr. Theophilus Mills Taylor, first moderator of the newly-formed United Presbyterian Church in the USA, is visiting Presbyterian projects in southern France this week. Accompanied by Dr. Charles Arbuthnot, European representative of the church's Board of Ecumenical Missions, Dr. Taylor is visiting the Collège Cévenol in Le Chambon-sur-Lignon and Presbyterian work in Marseilles.

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More than 2,000 persons attended the four-hour funeral of Archbishop Michael on July 17 in New York. The archbishop, head of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of North and South America, and a president of the World Council of Churches, died on July 13 (see EPS No. 28). Officiating at the service was Bishop Germanos of the Southern States Diocese, who has been named as the temporary successor to the archbishop. Among those present for the funeral were New York Governor Averell Harriman and New York City Mayor Robert Wagner. Dr. Franklin Clark Fry represented the WCC.

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Swedish Pastor Birger Forell, long active on behalf of German war prisoners and expellees, died in Boras, Sweden, on July 4. During the war he worked in England with German POWs, and later helped set up the Espelkamp settlement in Westphalia, Germany, for expellees.

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More than 750,000 Bibles, New Testaments and portions of the Scriptures were distributed in East Germany last year by the 24 Bible societies there.

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Dr. Milan Dobrovolz has been consecrated as bishop of the Old Catholic Church of Serbia and Vojevodina. Present for the consecration service in Belgrade, led by Bishop Julian Pekala of Poland, were representatives of the Patriarchate of the Serbian Orthodox Church, of the Association of Priests in Yugoslavia and of the State Commission for Church Affairs.

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An exhibition on the activity of the East German government against the Church and religion is touring West Germany. The exhibition was set up by a West German government agency dealing with the question of re-unification.

E.P.S., Geneva

A Special Report

International Congregational Council Meets in USA

(Hartford, Connecticut) - From July 2-10, 450 Congregationalists from twenty-two countries heard reports of Christian action in all continents and considered their place in the ecumenical movement. The eighth assembly of the International Congregational Council, which was formed in London in 1891, took "God Speaks to Our World" as theme. Delegates were warned early by Dr. John C. Bennett, professor of Christian theology and ethics at Union Theological Seminary, New York, against simplifying the issues.

In a survey of "The World in Which We Live", Dr. Bennett stressed that when Christians face up to Communism "there has been a much too single-track policy of negation and it has not worked very well". He said the alternative was "to give positive help to nations which are tempted to think that Communists alone can solve their problems".

Calling for "greater sophistication" in dealing with Communism, Dr. Bennett declared that people of the West should attempt to understand the Russian fears of attack, "fears which are in part a matter of dogma but which are greatly strengthened by the western emphasis upon bases that surround the Soviet Union and by the continuous expressions of hostility against that country".

"Our chief hope for freedom," according to Dr. Bennett, "is not in any counter-revolution or in attacks from outside, but in the changes that come over a second generation of Communists, as fanaticism wanes and as they become preoccupied with constructive tasks in building their own societies."

Considering the challenge to action presented by the divided state of the world as Dr. Bennett saw it, Dr. Truman B. Douglass, executive vice-president of the Congregational Board of Home Missions in the USA, attacked the witness of Protestantism in local communities as "divisive and disruptive".

He told the council's assembly that Protestant weakness was "due to the responsibility felt by every denomination to demonstrate some kind of distinctiveness". He criticised Congregationalists who took this line, and said: "We are not invited to be distinctive; and the more we try to be distinctive the more we are likely to be merely eccentric or whimsical". He continued by saying that "we are coming to see that to prepare for recognition of denominational distinctiveness is to betray our heritage". Dr. Douglass cited many countries where Congregationalists have entered church unions recently, and said that "with Congregationalists already participating in more unions of Protestant churches than any other denomination, we have irretrievably committed ourselves to lose ourselves denominationally in the enlarging and deepening unity of the people of Christ."

A parallel line was taken by Dr. Leslie E. Cooke, associate general secretary of the World Council of Churches, who led into an address on the significance of the World Council by asking "Is not the real crux of the matter the Congregationalists' affirmation of their freedom to obey Jesus as Lord? May not this mean," he went on, "that in certain times and places obedience would mean presbyterial or even episcopal forms of government? Is not our essential witness

to affirm that there is nothing sacrosanct about any particular form of church order and that form depends upon what is dictated by obedience to Jesus as Lord in a particular time and situation?"

In one of a series of surveys from various continents, Dr. Chandran Devanesan of Madras Christian College, India, said that the rise of new nations in East Asia is inevitably accompanied by a wish for nationals as leaders in the churches. He asked "how many churches would accept the African missionary or youth worker" if they were sent to help in America.

"Interest groups" in the conference discussed religious education and church membership, audio-visual aids in the service of overseas missions and home missions, new ways of worship, the communion service, religious drama and the use of radio and television. There were also special meetings for women, youth, laymen and ministers.

The council elected Dr. Russell H. Stafford of the Hartford Seminary Foundation as its moderator for the next five-year period. E.P.S., Geneva

